OVER THE HEDGE

IS THE GENDER GAP CLOSING?

BELARUS AND LITHUANIA



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FOREWORD

Gender equality remains one of the key issues in Eastern Europe preventing the post-communist countries from reaching higher standards of democracy. In 2013 The Human Rights organization "Freedom House" referred Belarus to the group of "not free" countries in their Map of Freedom 2013. According to the Freedom House report for Belarus, "there are significant discrepancies in income between men and women, and women are poorly represented in leading government positions. As a result of extreme poverty, many women have become victims of the international sex trade." Assuring gender equality influences the overall democratic development of the country as it involves a broader circle of groups in the political and social process. Building and sustaining a modern democracy without female participation and equal rights is neither feasible nor acceptable, as this form of government is based on the crucial principles of equality between citizens.

Concerning matters of women's rights, the post-soviet region is usually seen as a single block of countries with similar developments. Considering the prevailing discourse about the region, it is worth looking at Belarus and Lithuania and comparing the situation of women. Both countries are relatively similar in their historical experiences, attitudes and regional peculiarities. However, the level of orientation towards Western integration differs significantly – Lithuania was an eager proponent for closer relations with the West for a long time, while Belarus is still seen as a relatively unpredictable country still locked in the Russian sphere of influence. Still, when it comes to women's rights, do the cases differentiate in any significant way? Does a closer integration towards Europe create a different environment for the spread of gender equality? Does orientation towards the West (in this case, the European Union) entail differences in women's role in education, labour markets and business? Later, the prevailing familial roles are analyzed.

WOMEN IN EDUCATION, LABOUR AND BUSINESS: ATTITUDES AND REALITY

The fields of education, labour and business are of crucial importance to every individual. Education usually provides them with a starting point and the necessary knowledge to “get by” in life, while also playing a socializing role. After that, labour and business are the main areas for further activities to assure fulfilment, self-realization and financial security. Thus, equal opportunity in these spheres is crucial in order to ensure the societal well-being. Neither Belarus, nor Lithuania can complain about lack of any problems in these areas. The reality shows that treatment of women still needs to be addressed in both countries. However, Lithuania seems to be just a tad bit further down the road of transformation.



I. DO CURRENT EDUCATION SYSTEMS ENGENDER SEXISM?

One of the most important realms for socialization and development of a young person is the education system, namely schools and universities. Unfortunately, even in developed Western countries, the educational process is often marked by the stereotyping of men and women. According to some critics, "children learn sexism at school"[1]. In their view, sexism learnt in schools and universities paves the way for the future distinction of choosing "male" and "female" professions and enforces the already burgeoning myths about gender roles. Eastern Europe is not an exception. Historically formed gender, cultural, and social stereotypes, contrary to legal norms, usually are not fair to women and create unnecessary barriers despite the possibilities for better opportunities.[2] Lithuania and Belarus also experience this problem.

The legal foundations of the Republic of Belarus formally emphasize equality between male and female citizens, including education. Women make up at least half of all higher education students in the country (57% in 2014 according to the official data)[3]. According to research, however, women usually experience difficulties in gaining access to study in programmes, which are perceived to be "male" (i.e.

1 Athene Donald „Reinforcing genderstereotypes: how our schools narrow children's choices", *The Guardian,* <http://www.theguardian.com/science/occams-corner/2013/dec/09/gender-stereotypes-schools-children-choices> [last visited 2014-04-03].
2 Людмила Петина «Гендерные аспекты предпринимательской деятельности», In Л. Петина и др. *На пути к демократии и гендерному равенству*, Minsk, 2009, p. 96-97.
3 "Статистический обзор к Международному женскому дню", *Belstat.gov.by,* <http://belstat.gov.by/homep/ru/indicators/pressrel/8_march.php> [last visited 2014-04-14].



technical sciences, physics, math, etc.).[4] The disparities are illustrated by the fact that even if Belarusian women manage to get accepted into "masculine" study programmes, they often receive lower grades because of their "inability to comprehend" that particular branch of science.[5] The division is further accentuated by analysing the male-female student ratio in different study programmes of Belarusian universities. It shows that women dominate the following areas of education: pedagogy (77.2%), arts and design (72%), humanities (77. 3%) among others. Men, in their part, dominate technologies (73.2%), architecture (66.8%), agriculture, parks and recreation (66.9%), security (85.5%).[6] Thus, while looking at statistics one can deduce that the Belarusian education system is divided into areas of "feminine" and "masculine" studies, allowing the historical gender stereotypes to prevail.

The situation in Lithuania is quite similar, displaying the common history and attitudes shared in the region. Women make up 59.8% of all students studying at institutions of higher education in Lithuania.[7] According to the official data, during the study year 2012-2013, men were dominant in studies of computing (87%), engineering (86.3%),architecture (70%).[8] However, the majority of students in pedagogy (71.6%), arts (71.6%), humanities (75.6%), social sciences (70%), healthcare (74.6) and social care (88.2%) are women.[9] Thus, there seems to be similar areas of studies dominated respectively by men

4 Ирина Соломатина «Системный гендерный перекос в Беларуси» или как происходит дискриминация по признаку пола (в отношении женщин)», *Eurocenter*.by, <http://eurocenter.by/studies/sistemnyy-gendernyy-perekos-v-belarusi-ili-kak-proishodit-diskriminaciya-po-priznaku-pola-v> [last visited 2014-04-03].
5 *Ibid.*.
6 «Женщины и мужщины Республики Беларусь. Статистический сборник», *Национальный статистический комитет Республики Беларусь*, Минск, 2013, p. 124.
7 Lithuanian Department of Statistics, http://www.stat.gov.lt/
8 *Ibid.*
9 *Ibid.*

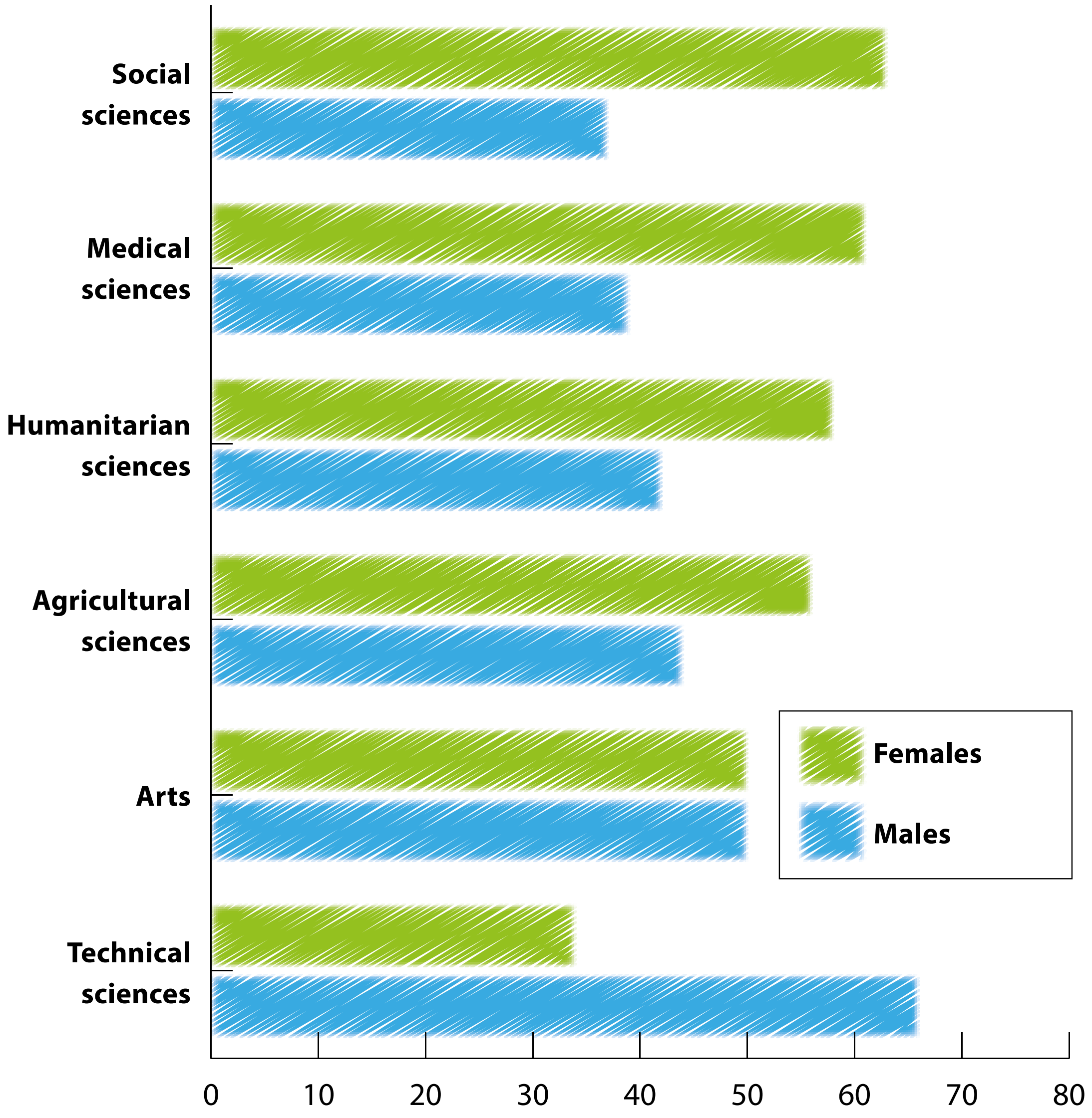


Figure 1. Percentage of researchers by field of study in Belarus,2011

and women in both Belarus and Lithuania. Women still experience the so-called *horizontal segregation*, as they find it harder to be accepted into particular study areas when compared to men.

In terms of *vertical segregation,* the overall situation in both countries seems to differ a bit more.[10] According to the European Commission research “She Figures 2012” analyzing the woman’s role in research and education, Lithuania is one of the leading countries in research participation – there are more women engaged in scientific research than men. Furthermore, there are more scientists among working women than working men in Lithuania.[11] Lithuania is also among the top three European countries where more than half of academicians with a doctor’s degree are women (58%).[12] This puts Lithuania at the forefront of European countries.

The issue of *vertical segregation* in Belarus is more apparent. According to research, only 17% percent of Belarusian women in education have been able to attain a PhD degree. As it can be seen in the diagram on the below, the number of women researchers, already being smaller than men at the lower levels of an academic career, is gradually decreasing when ascending the academic ladder. This can be interpreted as an obvious example of *vertical segregation* through the implementation of the so-called *glass ceiling*. Despite women being the majority in academic institutions (in some instances they overwhelmingly outnumber men)[13], they are

10 *Vertical segregation* is described as discrimination based on gender stereotypes in higher levels of education, i.e. the possibilities to receive higher academic degrees.

11 “Proportion of female researchers, 2009”, *She Figures 2012: Gender in Research and Innovation, Statistics and Indicators*, European Commission, 2013, p. 26.

12 *Ibid*, p. 51

13 Татьяна Щурко «Есть ли женщинам место в белорусской науке?», *Наше мнение*, <http://nmnby.eu/news/analytics/4929.html> [last visited 2014-04-03].

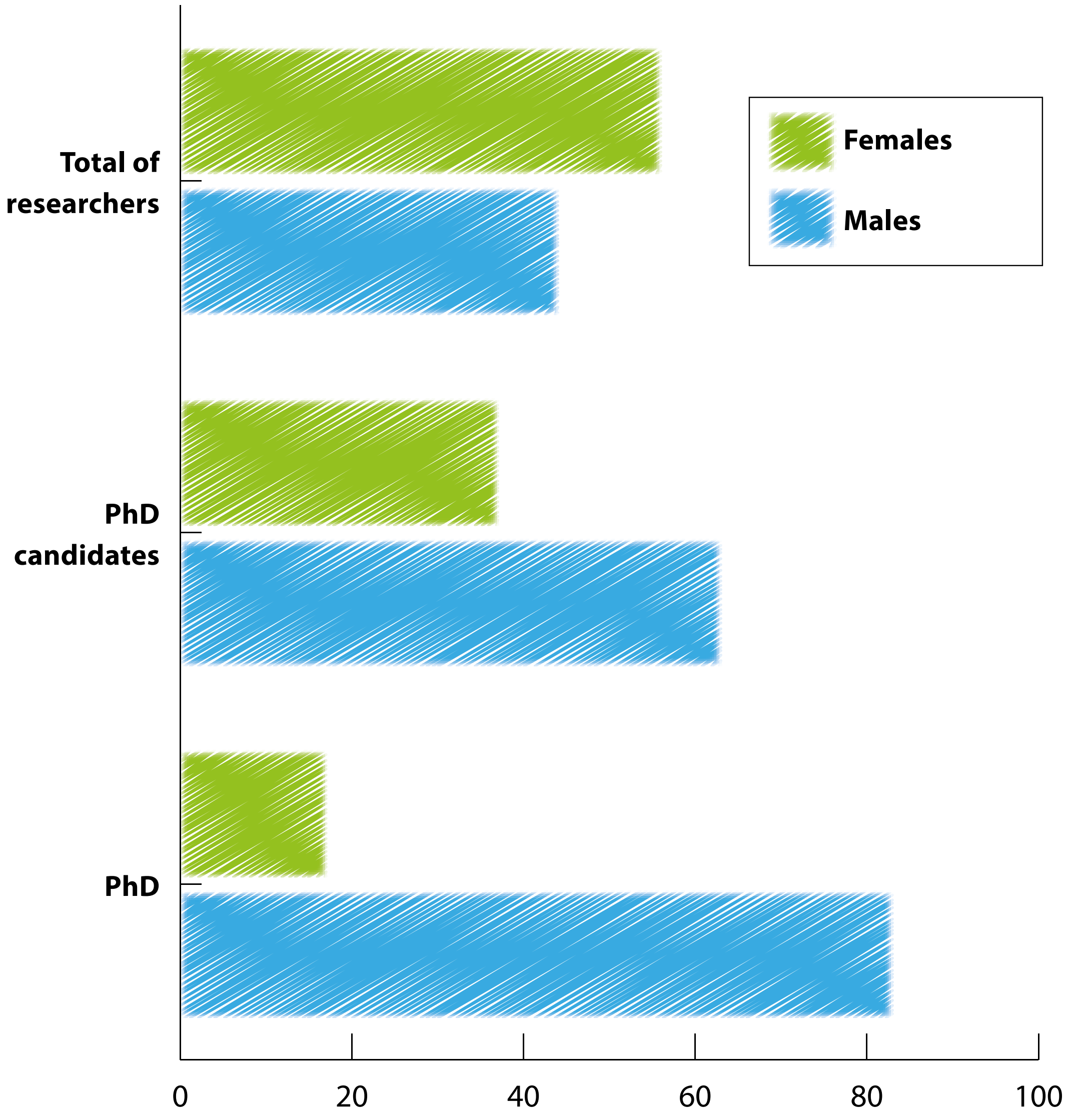


Figure 2. Percentage of researchers with academic degrees in Belarus, 2011

not able to fulfil their academic careers because of prevailing stereotypes about women not having the necessary competences to occupy higher positions.

These stereotypes enforce an image of a high academic career as a “masculine” sphere, reserved only for more assertive men.[14] The attitude is reflected in the male-female ratio occupying higher positions in education institutions. Even though overall there are more women working as lecturers and teachers, a low number of them reach higher positions in educational institutions and only 7.1 % become rectors.[15] The situation in Lithuania on this particular aspect does not seem that much different – only 11.8 % of higher education institutions are headed by women.[16]

Gender stereotypes and prejudices prevail in both the Belarusian and Lithuanian educational systems. On one hand, women are dominant in a good number of study fields in both countries. However, there are often difficulties for aspiring women to be accepted into studies considered “masculine”. This trend, still engrained among the members of academia in some circles, hinders women participation. The lack of women in managing and leading positions in academic institutions also plays its part in maintaining the problem with women’s rights in both countries.

14 Ирина Чикалова «Социальная идентичность ученых-белорусок», *Gender-route.org*, <http://gender-route.org/articles/fortune/social_naya_identichnost_uchenyh-belorusok/http://gender-route.org/articles/fortune/social_naya_identichnost_uchenyh-belorusok/> [last visited 2014-04-14].

15 Щурко.

16 “Proportion of female heads of institution in the Higher Education Sector” *She Figures 2012: Gender in Research and Innovation, Statistics and Indicators*, European Commission, 2013, p. 115.

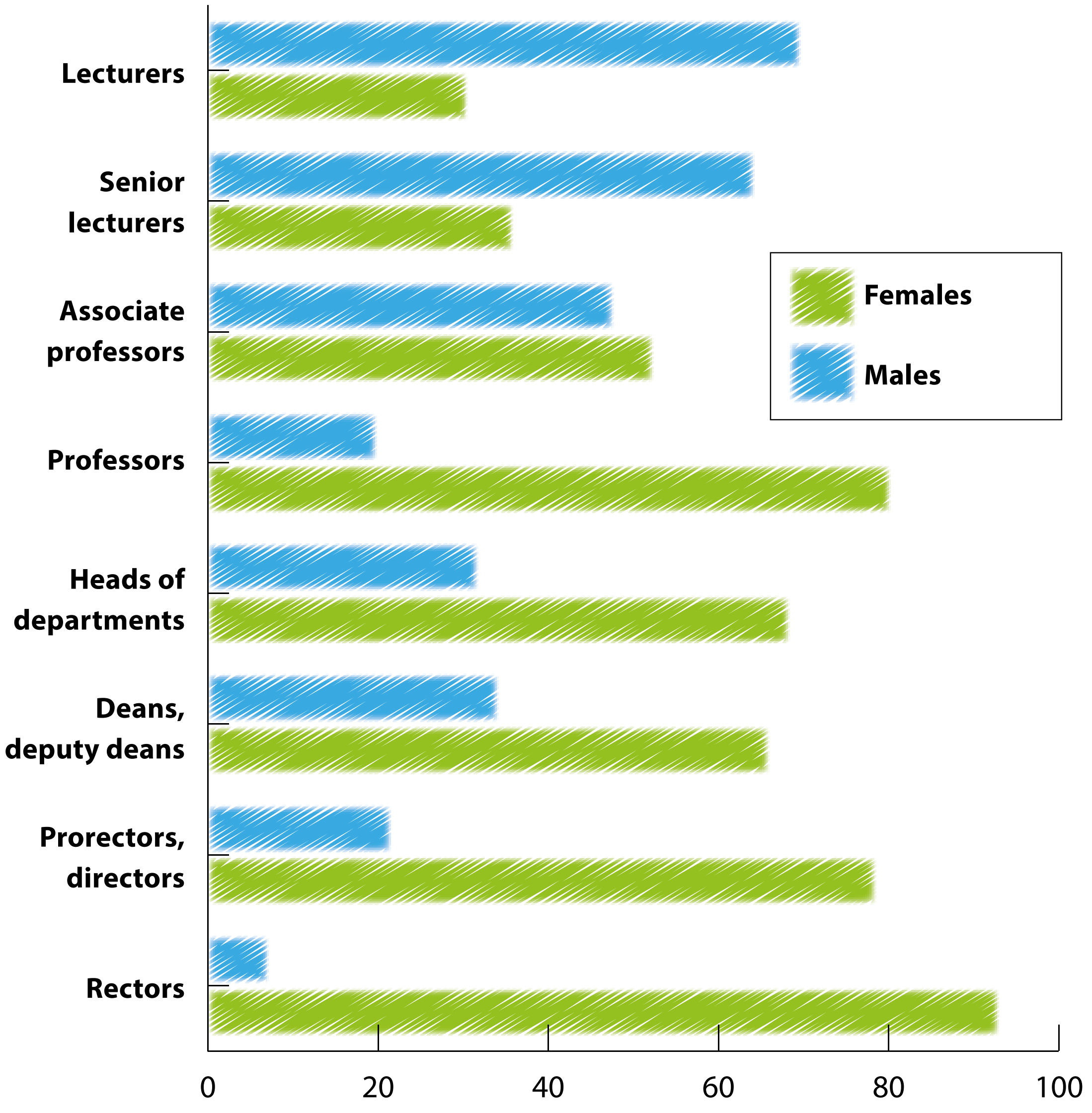


Figure 3. Constellation of academic degrees in Belarus by gender (percentage), end of 2009.

However, there are some differences which represent the progress of transformation. Only 17% of all PhDs are women in Belarus. However, in this regard Lithuania is one of the leading European countries with women making up more than half of PhDs. This shows that Lithuania is slowly overcoming its prejudice against women. To conclude, the tendencies show that both countries face certain issues regarding women in academic careers, however the situation in Lithuania seems to be gradually improving.



II. A WOMAN HAS TO EITHER BE A TEACHER, OR STAY AT HOME AND BE A HOUSEWIFE?

Stereotypes transfer to everyday lives of individuals. The realms of business and labour are not exceptions. Women to this day face difficult tasks in assuring their financial independence and self-realization.

Turning the attention towards the labour market in Lithuania and considering the data provided by Eurostat, women and men in Lithuania are equally employed. [17] Furthermore, according to the World Economic Forum Gender Gap 2013 report, the economic participation of women is just slightly below that of men and even more surprisingly, specialist women outnumber men. [18] The Lithuanian Labour Exchange shows that there are practically as many unemployed women, as men (48 % of total unemployed citizens are women at the end of 2013).[19]

Overall the situation in Belarus seems to be similar. According to official statistics, in June 2013

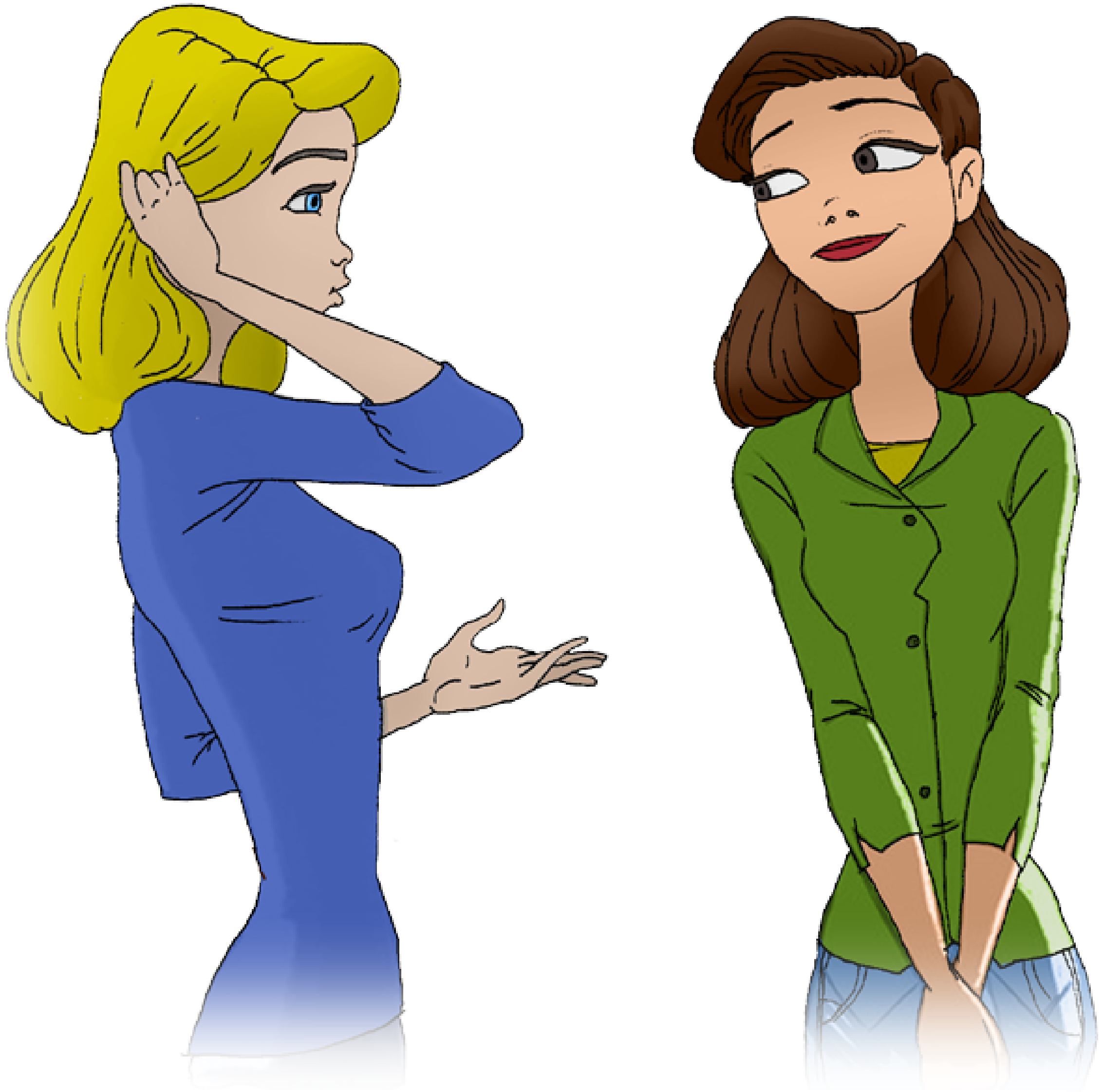
40% of all unemployed citizens were women.[20] Furthermore, there are more Belarusian women specialists than men, as showcased by

17 "Užimtumo lygis pagal lytį, amžių ir įgytą išsilavinimą", *Eurostat* <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Employment_statistics/lt#U.C5.BEimtumo_lygis_pagal_lyt.C4.AF.2C_am.C5.BEi.C5.B3_ir_.C4.AFgyt.C4.85_i.C5.A1silavinim.C4.85> [last visited 2014-04-15].

18 „Country profiles: Lithuania", *The Global Gender Gap Report* 2013, World Economic Forum, 2013, p. 258.

19 „Situation review", *Lithuanian Labour Exchange*, <http://www.ldb.lt/Informacija/DarboRinka/Puslapiai/situacija.aspx> [last visited 2014-04-15].

20 «В Беларуси безработных женщин меньше, чем мужчин», *Naviny.by*, <http://naviny.by/rubrics/society/2013/08/15/ic_news_116_422918/> [last visited 2014-04-15].



the higher number of women with higher education (57.7 % of women versus 42.3 % of men).[21]

Both the Lithuanian and Belarusian data shows seemingly optimistic and positive developments in the employment of women and their abilities to become specialists. However, despite the overall numbers, women in both countries suffer from various visible forms of discrimination based on gender stereotypes in labour.

One of the most obvious differences between men and women in the labour market is based on the myth that women cannot be as good in their work as men, despite the level of education. For example, in 2012 the Belarusian female salary was 74.5% of the (equivalent) male salary, a difference of almost 25%.[22] As noted by a lot of researchers and women's rights activists in Belarus, these discrepancies are a direct example of prevailing stereotypes influencing the social reality in the country. Women are still seen "as not worthy", "out of place" and not deserving of the same salary, despite their professional skills.

In Lithuania the male salary is 12% higher than that of the female. Despite it still being a widespread problem, Lithuania also displays better numbers than the overall statistics of the European Union – the male salary in the EU is 16% higher than female. The numbers would suggest a substantially more positive situation in Lithuania. However, as noted by the Lithuanian minister of Social Protection and Labour, gender stereotypes are still a great problem in the Lithuanian labour market. One of the main reasons behind the lower pay for women is the often lower salary paid for so-called specialists of "feminine" professions. For example,

21 «Женщины и мужщины Республики Беларусь. Статистический сборник», p. 121.
22 «Ситуация на рынке труда», *За полчаса до весны: Доклад о неравенстве и дискриминации в Беларуси*, Equal Rights Trust, 2013, p. 135.





people working in the "masculine" transport and building fields usually earn more than specialists, working as teachers, lecturers or nurses. Thus despite providing the fastest growing salaries for women in the EU[23], a major divide between well-paid "masculine" and low-paid "feminine" professions still prevail in Lithuania.

The situation in Belarus could be considered even worse. From the year 2000, a law "About women's participation in heavy labour or work in dangerous environments" has been adopted. The law lists a pre-determined set of professions (total of 252)[24], that women are not allowed to take up because of various reasons related to skills, health and hazards, etc.[25] Admittedly, the majority of professions listed are not considered safe, or even "suitable" for women (technical work with chemicals, or heavy physical work, etc.). The State considers these professions to be "masculine" and do not allow women to choose them. It should be noted that the majority of these professions are well-paid (e.g. international drivers). The existence of a legal act, forbidding women to take up some particular professions, further contributes to the already engrained gender stereotypes and gender pay gap in the country removing even the theoretical possibility for women to get better-paid jobs.

23 „Skirtumas tarp vyrų ir moterų atlyginimo Lietuvoje mažėja sparčiausiai ES:, *Kauno diena,* <http://kauno.diena.lt/naujienos/verslas/ekonomika/ek-skirtumas-tarp-vyru-ir-moteru-atlyginimo-lietuvoje-mazeja-sparciausiai-es-496047#.Ut_CAftc74Y> [last visited 2014-04-15].

24 Алена Лешкевич «Женская и мужская работа: биология или история?» in E. Минченя, О Сасункевич (ред.) *Гендерный ликбез*, Belarusian Human Rights House:Vilnius, 2013, p. 38.

25 «О Списке тяжелых работ и работ с вредными и (или) опасными условиями труда, на которых запрещается применение труда женщин», *Национальный правовой интернет-портал Республики* Беларусь, <http://www.pravo.by/main.aspx?guid=3871&p0=-c20000765&p2={NRPA}> [last visited 2014-04-15].

III. BUSINESSWOMEN IN BELARUS AND LITHUANIA: MYTH OR REALITY?

The above mentioned division between “masculine” and “feminine” jobs is further emphasized in the field of business. According to researchers, the experience of Belarusian women entrepreneurship is tightly connected to historical experiences. During the Soviet times, women were integrated in the socialist job market, working even in factories with technical equipment.[26] On the other hand, women were not usually considered to be potential entrepreneurs because of their alleged inability to occupy managing positions. This isolated women from the business network.

Despite the fact that in a lot of polls men do not consider women managers to be any more different from men, a stereotype of emotional woman is very widely prevalent (28 % of respondents in polls still believe that women are too emotional to occupy managing positions).[27] Proponents of this idea contest, that women are a lot more often led by their emotions, thus their judgement is clouded and not suited for the harsh, competitive and “masculine” field of business. There is a popular stereotypical opinion, that the man is the breadwinner, whereas the woman should stay at home and take care of the household. As a result, a woman in business is sometimes even thought to be “a man in a skirt”, defying the tradition that “a wife has to earn less than a husband”, and

26 Людмила Петина «Гендерные аспекты предпринимательской деятельности», In Л. Петина и др. *На пути к демократии и гендерному равенству*, Minsk, 2009, p. 97.

27 Алина Таряник «Семя, а не карьера?», *СН Плюс*, <http://www.sn-plus.com/ru/page/society/2253> [last visited 2014-04-15].





bringing harm to the family because "a businesswoman cannot be a gentle wife and a caring mother".[28]

This transfers to the practice and mentality of business. First of all, because of a lack of corporate contacts it becomes more difficult for women to receive credit or funding for business activities. Secondly women are usually seen as incompetent and not trustworthy because of their inexperience and lack of affiliation with proven businessmen.[29] Furthermore, the prevailing masculinization in the realm of business in the wider cultural discourse creates a phenomenon of *self-discrimination* among women themselves. A lot of women, informed about the brutal and intense competition in business, decide against participating in the market. Business "should be left to men", since they are more aggressive, not as "soft" as women and can deal with pressure more effectively. Thus despite positive developments in Belarus (women entrepreneurship is actively growing), stereotypes still prevail and often act as an obstacle for women self-realization.

Stereotypes prevailing in Lithuania are similar. Women are considered not to be "built" for harsh and competitive business environments and more suitable for family life. Research shows that in 2012 only 9 % of Lithuanian women try their hand in business (16th place in the EU).[30] Women also usually engage in smaller business, or business oriented towards social matters (teaching etc.). However, growth is being noticed, as women are becoming more and more active. Overall statistics show that women

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28 Ольга Астапович «Развитию «женского» бизнеса мешают общественное мнение и… воспитание», *Заутра*, <http://www.zautra.by/art.php?sn_nid=11674&sn_cat=22> [last visited 2014-04-15].

29 «Эксперт: Бизнес – это безликое существо, и в нем не должны работать гендерные стереотипы», *TUT*.by, <http://news.tut.by/society/204001.html> [last visited 2014-04-15].

30 „Lietuva neišnaudoja moterų verslumo potencialo", *Versli* Lietuva, <http://www.verslilietuva.lt/lt/naujienos/versli-lietuva-naujienos/lietuva-neisnaudoja-moteru-verslumo-potencialo/> [last visited 2014-04-15].

in Belarus and Lithuania have similar achievements and are dealing with similar stereotypes when it comes to starting a business. However, women in Lithuania seem to agree that without the structural barriers (stereotyping etc.), the overall situation for a woman to start her own business is quite favourable, as both men and women have equal basic starting positions.[31] This could partly explain the difficulties in Belarus – lack of more formal mechanisms, public campaigns and prevailing reliance on informal networks between "trusted" entrepreneurs can create problems for women entering into business.

For a long time attempts by women to take leadership were seen to be as a laughable or untrustworthy attempt to play a "man's" game. This has created difficulties for Belarusian and Lithuanian women to enter the so-called corporate networks, already dominated by men. The Inability to establish contacts makes it more complicated to get credit to start a business and maintain it. The situation has changed over the years through various legal acts, social programmes and other initiatives - the realm of business was made more open to women and today women are considered to be more active, and some experts are even talking about positive developments for male-female partnerships in the business sphere, in the light of spreading understanding that business is "without genders". However, the stereotype of a woman, who is "ought" to be a housewife and a mother are still prevailing in the Belarusian and Lithuanian society. How do these stereotypes stay alive, even in light of the progress of the modern world? One answer is the traditional familial roles, prevailing throughought Eastern Europe.

31 „Moterys versle:kelia riziką ar įkvepia vyrus tobulėti?", *balsas.lt*, <http://www.balsas.lt/naujiena/614434/moterys-versle-kelia-rizika-ar-ikvepia-vyrus-tobuleti> [last visited 2014-04-15].





FAMILY ROLES IN LITHUANIA AND BELARUS: „BLAST FROM THE PAST“?

Women still have a harder time than men in balancing their family lives and careers. For example, eligibility and duration of maternity leave, the general attitude towards women’s familial role and the perception of family could be considered among the more obvious aspects of contention among women‘s rights activists. Solving these issues to some extent even define the strength of civil society. How does Belarus and Lithuania fare in this respect? Although statistical evidence sometimes may suppose otherwise, there are stereotypes and myths, which still prevail. One can easily point out the fundamental issue – the dominance of the male system – patriarchy.

The World’s top independent charity for children in need “Save the Children” annually publishes reports presenting the ranking of the most suitable places for mothers all around the world. Five indicators are taken into account: maternal health, the educational and economic situation, children well-being, and also the participation of women in national political bodies. According to the results of 2013, Belarus together with Lithuania were ranked rather highly: The two countries shared 26th place out of 176 countries.[32] It is worth mentioning, that both countries even managed to overtake its neighbours: Belarus and Lithuania were

32 „2013 Mothers‘ Index Rankings“, *Surviving the First Day: State of the World’s Mothers 2013*, Save the Children, 2013, p. 69.

“well ahead of all the CIS countries, as well as some EU member states such as Poland, Hungary and Malta.”[33]

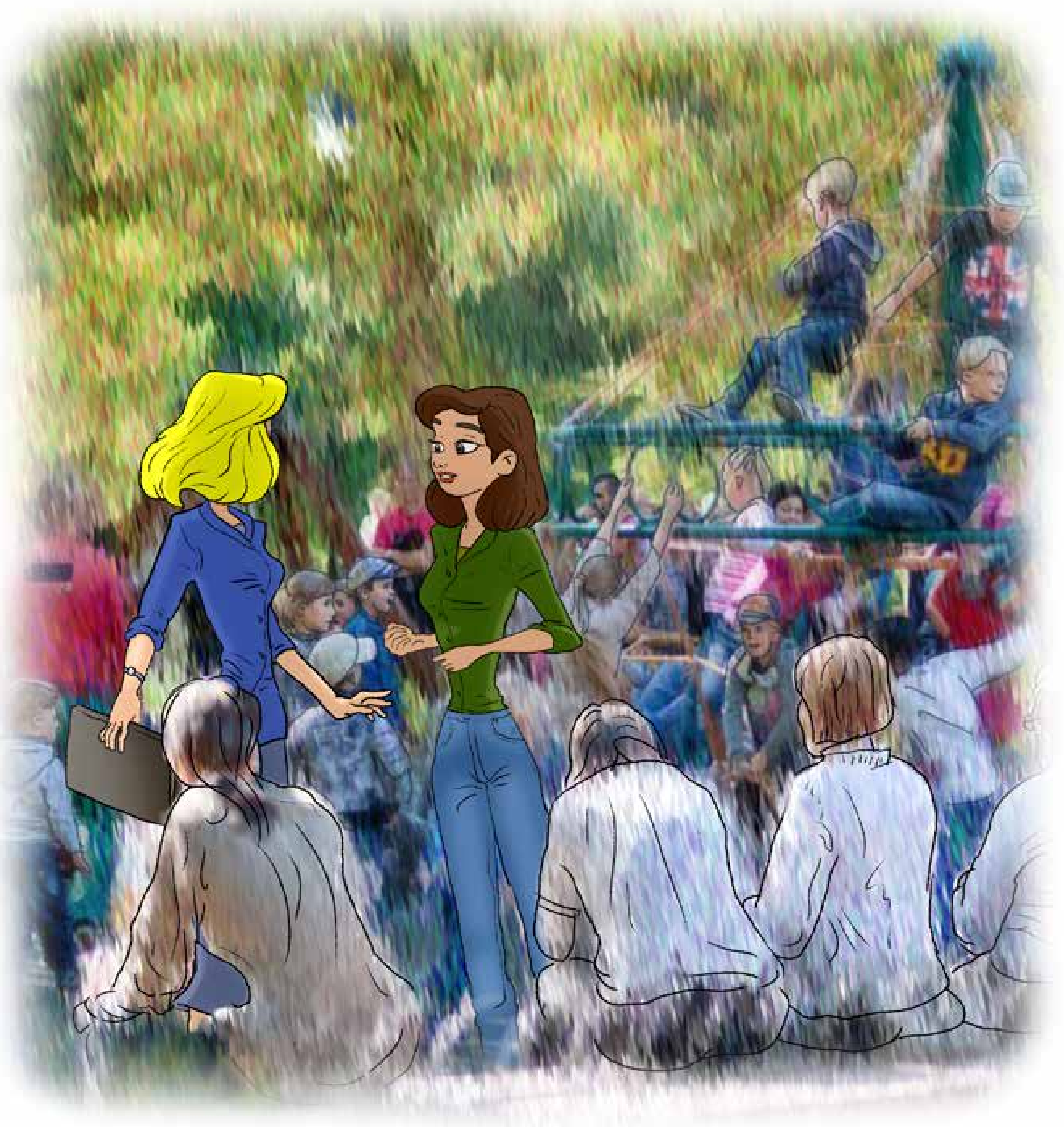
According to the Labour Law of the Republic of Belarus, both women and men can have parental leave. However, paternity leave seems to be a myth – only one percent of families, giving birth to their children, choose paternity leave instead of maternity leave.[34] A Very similar situation occurs in Lithuania,[35] thus enforcing the myth that women should be the ones caring for little children while men are working.

Why are fathers still reluctant to leave their work and take care of their children? First of all, prevailing stereotypes play their role: a man is a worker and a citizen, who should be active in the community, make the decisions and earn money. A woman in her turn is a housewife and a mother, her place is at home with her family and children. Society does not accept a man, who leaves his work in order to take care of his children as this is considered to be unmanly. On the other hand, a woman leaving her kids at home and going to work is considered to be mannish.

The second reason is more pragmatic – generally women still earn less than men and mother’s leave is perceived less damaging to a family’s budget. However, it should be noted, that legislatively Lithuanian authorities have tried to solve this problem – from the second year of parental leave the family can ask the government to pay them 40% of either parent’s salary and the couple can choose which salary it will be.

33 Paula Borowska „Motherhood in Belarus: An Example to Follow?“, *Belarus Digest*, <http://belarusdigest.com/story/motherhood-belarus-example-follow-15223> [last visited 2014-04-15].
34 «Папа в декретном отпуске. В Беларуси это пока не модно», *Naviny.*by, <http://naviny.by/rubrics/society/2012/01/24/ic_articles_116_176598/ > [last visited 2014-04-15].
35 „Mamos ir tėčiai Lietuvoje“, *Lithuanian Department of Statistics,* <http://osp.stat.gov.lt/pranesimai-spaudai?articleId=557422> [last visited 2014-04-15].





As very often is the case, the father's salary is bigger than the mother's, so couples could ask to receive 40% of the man's salary. However, even in this situation, it is the woman who is staying at home with the children, as this is traditional.[36]

In Belarus the payment for parental leave does not depend on either parent's salary, as the amount is fixed. At the beginning of 2014 this sum was approximately 160 EUR.[37] A woman who gives birth also receives a one-off birth grant which is around 1,115 USD. However, despite the substantial one-off grant, in the long run, the amount seems to be insufficient for the father (who usually gets paid more) to take parental leave. Thus, on the one hand the low payment seems to affect the fact that women usually stay at home with their children, however on the other hand, the Lithuanian example shows, that even if the family gets a bigger payment, stereotypical attitudes of society prevent men from taking parental leave.

Long maternity leave also has an impact on the women's economic independence, as she is becoming dependent on her husband, who is the only breadwinner. What is more, women do not practice their profession and lose their qualification. Very often, women face difficulties in returning to work after maternity leave. All these facts contribute to the division of the roles within the family: The man is a breadwinner, the women is a house-wife.

Social segregation between genders has an exceptional role in Belarusian society. The so called traditionalist attitudes continue to affect

36 Eglė Piekienė „Susikeisti vietomis vilioja didesnės išmokos", *Vakarų Ekspresas*, <http://www.ve.lt/uploads/files/1616_attachment_11_19024588087881.pdf> [last visited 2014-04-15].

37 «В Беларуси с ноября возрастают детские пособия», *БЕЛТА*, <http://www.belta.by/ru/all_news/society/V-Belarusi-s-nojabrja-vozrastajut-detskie-posobija_i_650578.html> [last visited 2014-04-15].

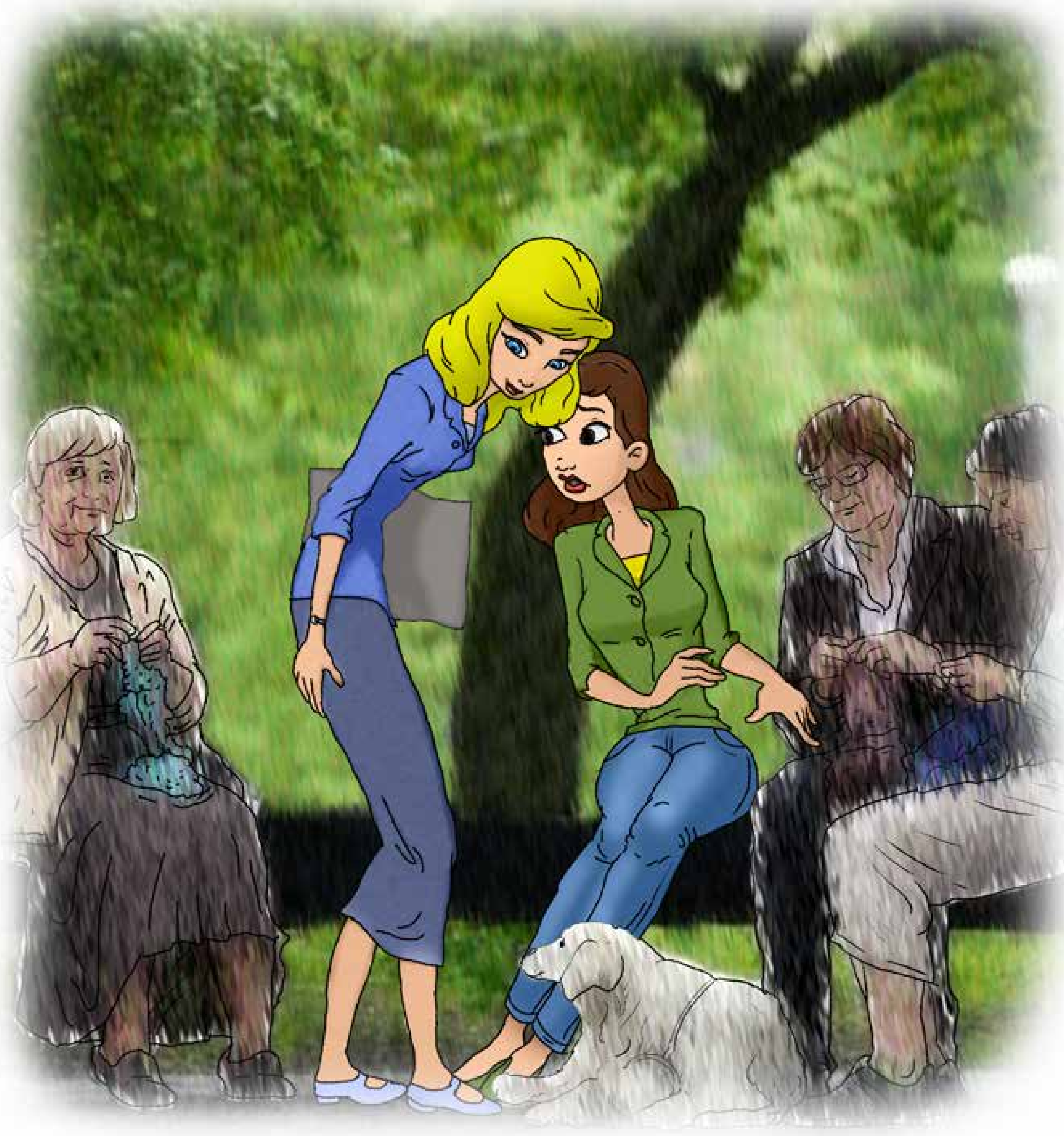
the status of women in Belarus in various areas of life. Women's opportunities are limited by the unequal distribution of domestic work. The issue of domestic violence raises a lot of concerns too – it should even be considered to be the essential problem Belarusian women face. Statistical data shows that 80 % of Belarusian women aged 18-60 have been victims of psychological violence in the family, 25% of women have faced physical violence, 22.4 % of women have experienced economic violence and 13.1 % - sexual abuse by their husbands or partners. 8 % of Belarusian women have experienced physical and sexual violence in their family. Having experienced physical and sexual abuse, only 6.0 % of men and 46.8 % of women asked for help.[38]

Domestic violence is a very complex issue, as the majority of society does not perceive it as a crime. Very often victims themselves do not understand that they need help; because of the prevailing attitude in society victims are trying to mask the evidence of domestic violence. Still popular among Belarusians is a stereotypical phrase "Abuse is a sign of love", which comes from the patriarch mode of society where a man is a strong head of the family and a woman is a house-wife who has to obey.

What is more, despite the numerous CEDAW recommendations, Belarus still does not have a law preventing domestic violence. Violence within the family is still perceived as a private matter, which cannot be regulated by the state. Such a situation decreases the victim's possibilities to ask for protection.

In Lithuania domestic violence is also a very substantial problem as, by the number of victims of domestic violence, it is among the leading

38 «Исследование ситуации домашнего насилия в Республике Беларусь», Ребёнок.BY, <http://rebenok.by/articles/together/nasilie/16294-issledovanie-situatsy-domashnego-nasiliya-v-respublike-belarus.html> [last visited 2014-04-15].





countries in the EU . According to surveys, 15% of Lithuanian women aged 18-74 have experienced domestic violence at least once in their life. 27.85% of victims have experienced economic violence, 48.10% have experienced physical violence, 11.39% have faced sexual violence and 87.34% have suffered from psychological violence. [39]

In 2011 Lithuania managed to adopt the Law on Protection against Domestic Violence. The adoption of the law was a result of a hard and very long advocacy made by Lithuanian NGOs, fighting for women's rights. Lithuania's membership in the EU also had a positive impact on the process of adoption of the law. After the adoption of the law the official number of violent crimes perpetrated by a spouse or intimate partner increased from 618 victims to 4,582.[40] This substantial increase in victims who asked for help was the direct impact of the new law on protection against violence. It clearly showed, that domestic violence is not a private issue, this is a huge hidden society problem.

39 "Lithuania: Country profile", *WAVE Network*, <http://www.wave-network.org/sites/default/files/05%20LITHUANIA%20END%20VERSION.pdf> [2014-04-15].

40 *Struggling for gender equality: sharing Lithuanian and Bulgarian experience*, EESC:Vilnius, 2013, p. 14.

CONCLUSION

Gender equality and women's rights issues is a very difficult aspect to compare in post-soviet societies. Both, Lithuania and Belarus still face the same problems related to unequal treatment of women and men in society, which is based deeply on ingrained stereotypes.

The situation of women in Belarus also reflects the political and economic conditions in the country. The problems include women's poverty and employment discrimination; deterioration of women's health, including reproductive health; domestic violence and trafficking. There are worrying signs of a feminisation of poverty, with a higher number of women unemployed and lower payment for female specialists. [41]

Stereotypes about women are strongly inspired by the political culture. On this occasion – by the regime and President Alexandr Lukashenka himself, who famously declared that he "would like our women to give birth to no fewer than three children"[42]. The main problem lies in the creation of social myths. Such stereotypes do not usually seem apparent looking at the statistics (especially official ones) but nevertheless influence attitudes among members of society. These attitudes, in turn, later transfer to the more public spheres of education, work and politics.

Although Lithuania experiences very similar problems (stereotyping and structural barriers for self-realization in education, labour market and business), close cooperation with Western countries, compulsory adoption of the European norms and strategies, and active participation of NGOs, struggling for gender equality, in the policy making processes influence the gradual change of the situation towards the better.

41 „Belarus: executive summary" *International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent* Societies, p. 3 <http://www.ifrc.org/docs/appeals/annual10/MAABY00210p.pdf> [last visited 2014-04-15].

42 «Лукашенко о проекте «Большая семья»: За первого ребенка 10 тысяч долларов, за второго – 20, за третьего удваиваем», *TUT.by*, <http://news.tut.by/society/369599.html> [last visited 2014-04-15].



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